

One of the family

25 12 10

Eternal God,
who made this most holy night,
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:
bring us who have known the revelation of that light on earth,
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory,
when he comes again as our judge.

My text this morning is three verses from John's gospel (1 v10 – 12) as written in the Authorised Version: 'He was in the world, and the world was made by him but the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.'

Christmas is above all a time for the family. It is a time for family gatherings; it is a time when families get together to be with each other to eat and drink together and to share presents in each other's presence. Christmas is a family time. And there is a real sense of family in today's gospel from St John: of Jesus coming home to his kin, of being rejected by some and accepted by others.

John's description of the Incarnation is poetic and mystical. It echoes the Hebrew story of creation found in Genesis; it opens with the sonorous phrase, 'In the beginning', recalling that point when time began. It uses the Greek word, 'Logos',

‘λογος’, to embody the Old Testament idea of wisdom and the Greek philosophical view of knowledge to tell us something about the Son of God. Logos is one of the great Christological titles, indicating that Jesus is the Word of God, in this instance the creating word of God who brought the universe into being. As such, we have the wonderful notion that the Creator of the universe, and thereby the Creator of our world, was born into our world. And as we savour the delight of this knowledge, there is a sting in the tail: that the world failed to recognise Jesus as such - ‘He was in the world, and the world was made by him but the world knew him not.’

The notion of rejection is underlined by the idea of his rejection by his people. The Jews are the Children of God, they are the Chosen People of God and to them God made himself known. To them the Messiah was promised and to them the Messiah came and by some of them the Messiah was rejected. The idea is one of family: Jews trace their families back to a common ancestor, the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah. Through them and their one son Isaac, the people of God had come into being; in them the family has its roots. Jesus the Messiah is one of them and he came to them and by some of them he was rejected - ‘He came unto his own, and his own received him not.’

But not all Jews rejected him. We have the first twelve disciples who followed him.

We have the women who supported him. We have all those who were healed by him, all those whose lives were touched by his teaching and his presence among them. Even dying on the cross, the repentant thief was saved by him. And to these Jews, the possibility of being a true part of the family of God as sons of God was opened. But not only to them but also to all people was the possibility of becoming part of the family. Of the four gospels, John's most clearly embodies the idea that the good news is universal that Gentiles and Jews, all Mankind, are a potential part of the family of God – 'But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.'

Christmas is a family time. And fundamentally, the message of Christmas is one of family. We are all of one kind. We are all kin, one to another. As ever, the question is one of our response. Are we going to be kind or unkind? Are we going to be unkind and reject the son of God and therefore turn our backs on the possibility of being sons of God? Or are we going to be kind and to welcome Jesus wholeheartedly into our family, welcome the birth of the Christ-child, recognise him as our brother, accept him as one of our family? The choice is ours. But what we choose will colour how we make sense of the rest of our lives.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

25th December, 2010

H: Sermon 23: Family

